

## *The President's Daily Brief*

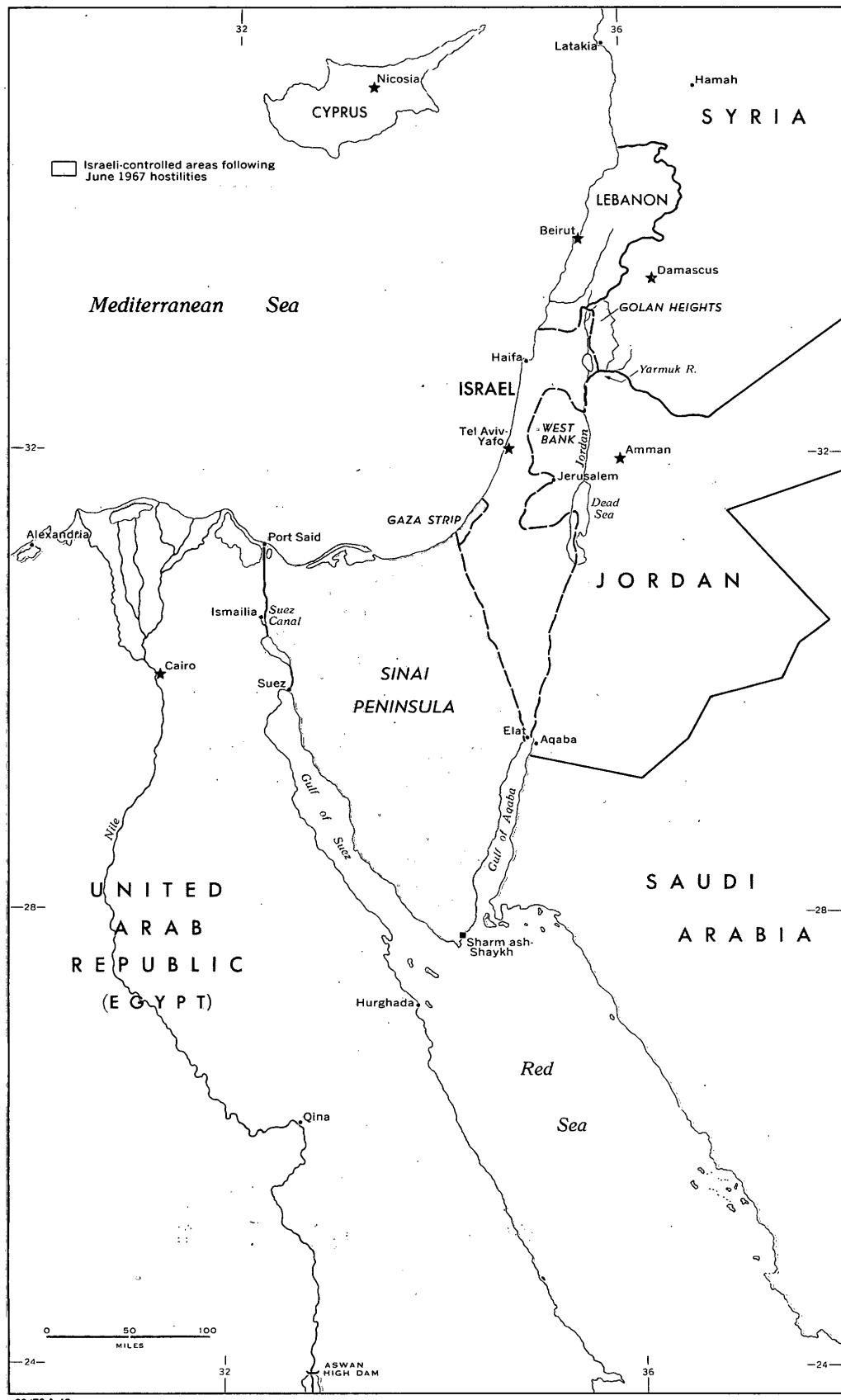
13 February 1969

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14 February 1969

LATE NOTES FOR THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF OF  
13 FEBRUARY 1969

I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

MIDDLE EAST

Paris realizes that four-power talks in New York can only come to a useful stage after considerable bilateral exchange and perhaps only after President Nixon's return from Europe, according to a French Foreign Ministry official. This official pointed out "important differences" in the French and US positions on the talks. Where the US looks at the talks as support for the Jarring mission, France regards them as an end in themselves. The French hope that the result of the talks would be a "self-imposed" peace agreed to by the parties concerned through the direct intervention of the four powers and on the basis of an agreement by the four after consultation with the parties.

When asked if the Soviets had given any new indications of their positions in eventual negotiations, the French official said the Soviets had indicated they would only unveil their real positions on Jerusalem, Arab refugees, and other key matters in "general conversations" and when it appeared there was some give in the Israeli position. However, they had also indicated to the French that they were ready to be much more flexible on these matters and to press the Arabs much harder than it had so far appeared in public. [redacted]

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Soviet Ambassador Malik, in conversation with Ambassador Yost, expressed mild doubt whether it would be sufficient merely to give Jarring and the parties a general statement of encouragement. He stressed their lack of progress thus far and suggested the four powers might lay down some specific guidelines, such as direction to implement the Security Council resolution in all its parts. In his usual fashion, Malik attributed the absence of progress to Israeli "negativism" and "arrogance." He was particularly irked that they had so swiftly rejected the Soviet plan, which, he argued, went far to meet their interests. [redacted]

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## EUROPE

There is nothing significant to report.

## SOVIET AFFAIRS

The Soviets and East Germans have confirmed that Marshal Yakubovsky, supreme commander of the Warsaw Pact, has been chairing a meeting in East Germany of the organization's chiefs of staff and deputy defense ministers. Yesterday's announcements did not give the precise location of the meeting, but it may have been at a training area west of Berlin where artillery and tactical air exercises have been noted. The Rumanian chief of staff was listed among the participants. Although the announcements of the meeting avoided any hint of its purpose, this is the time of year and the right level of military representation for planning 1969 maneuvers. (FBIS 39, 43, 13 Feb 69)

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VIETNAM

There is nothing significant to report.

II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

INDIA

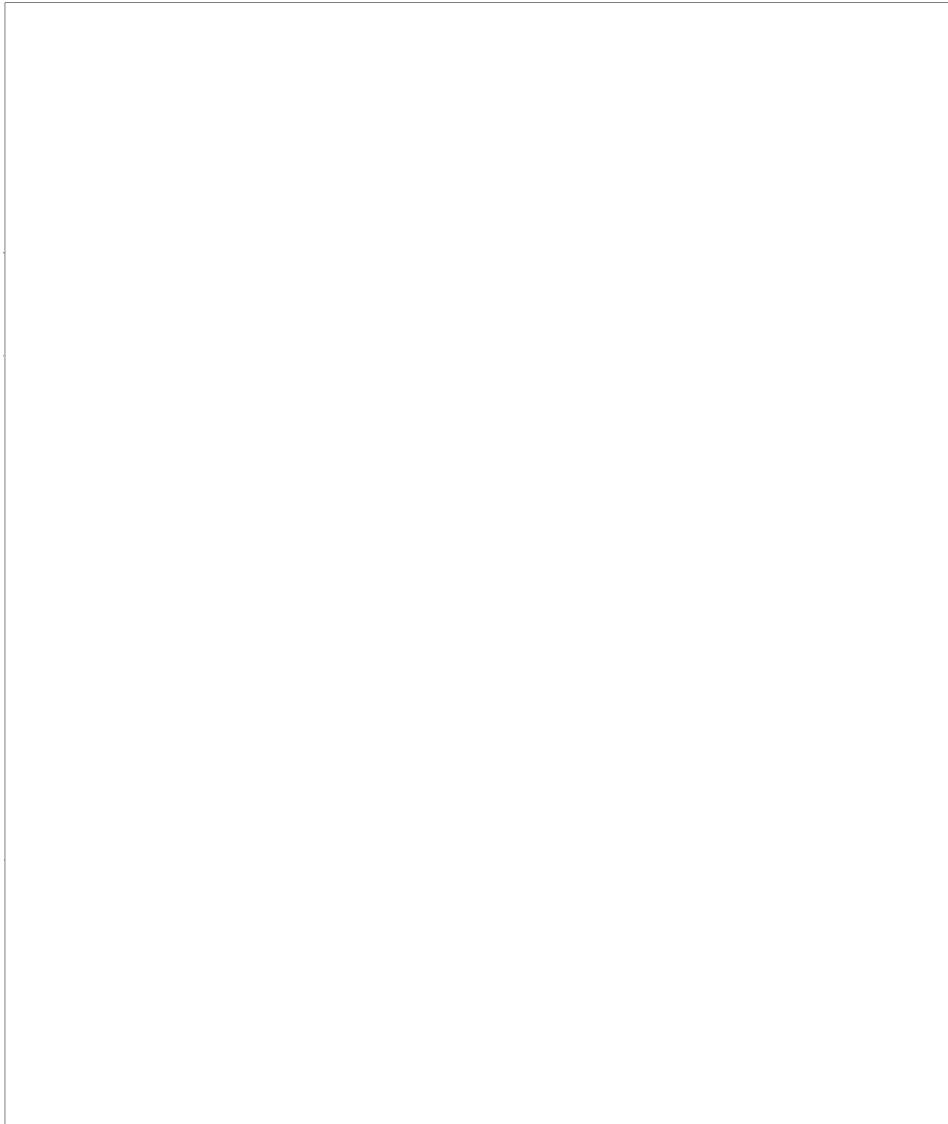
As part of a sudden cabinet reshuffle, Prime Minister Gandhi has appointed Commerce Minister Dinesh Singh as Minister of External Affairs. Singh, a confidant of Mrs. Gandhi, has a pro-Soviet reputation, and his opportunism has earned him widespread dislike among his colleagues. He has been generally critical of US policies and a difficult negotiator in his official dealings with Americans. (Various press, 13 Feb 69)

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I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

MIDDLE EAST

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EUROPE

The French, temporarily nonplussed at last week's Western European Union meeting, have begun to return to form.

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They have let it be known that they will not attend the meeting of Western European ambassadors which the British have called to discuss the Middle East. They have also come out against the compulsory consultations to which the other WEU members agreed.

The question now is whether all the other five Community members will stand up to the French. The West Germans, as usual, occupy a pivotal position. With Kiesinger and De Gaulle scheduled to meet next month, the Germans will be particularly sensitive to storm signals from Paris.

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So far the Germans seem to be holding the line. The communiqué issued today after the talks between Wilson and Kiesinger is a forthright affirmation of the two leaders' devotion to the goal of a unified Europe which would include Britain.

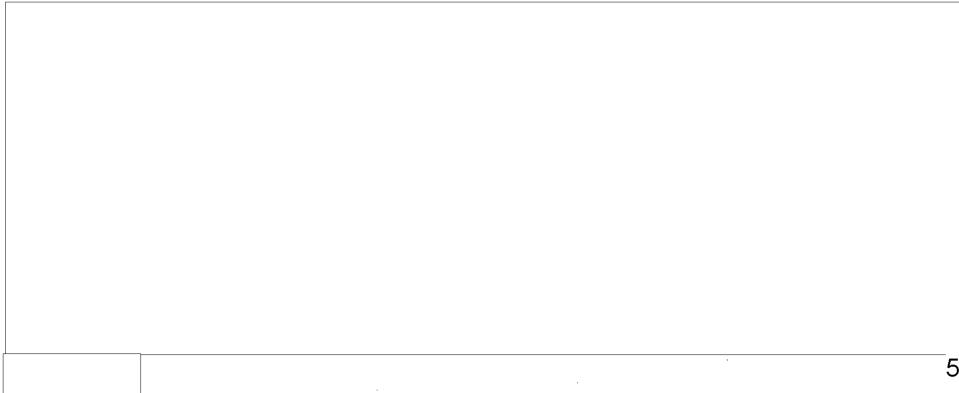
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SOVIET AFFAIRS

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The concept of the Communists operating as a legal political entity in South Vietnam seems to be gaining some acceptability among anti-Communists of long standing.

Spokesmen for a major faction of the Vietnam Nationalist Party (VNQDD), one of the few groups that can claim a national

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following in South Vietnam, have expressed their confidence that Vietnamese nationalists could accept "a political struggle" with the Communists. One leader went even further in implying that if coalition with the Communists "is the only way to restore peace," the nationalists would accept it. Coalition, the spokesman stated, is not something the nationalists have to fear. It remains to be seen whether other nationalist groups adopt a similar line or condemn it as playing into the hands of the enemy.

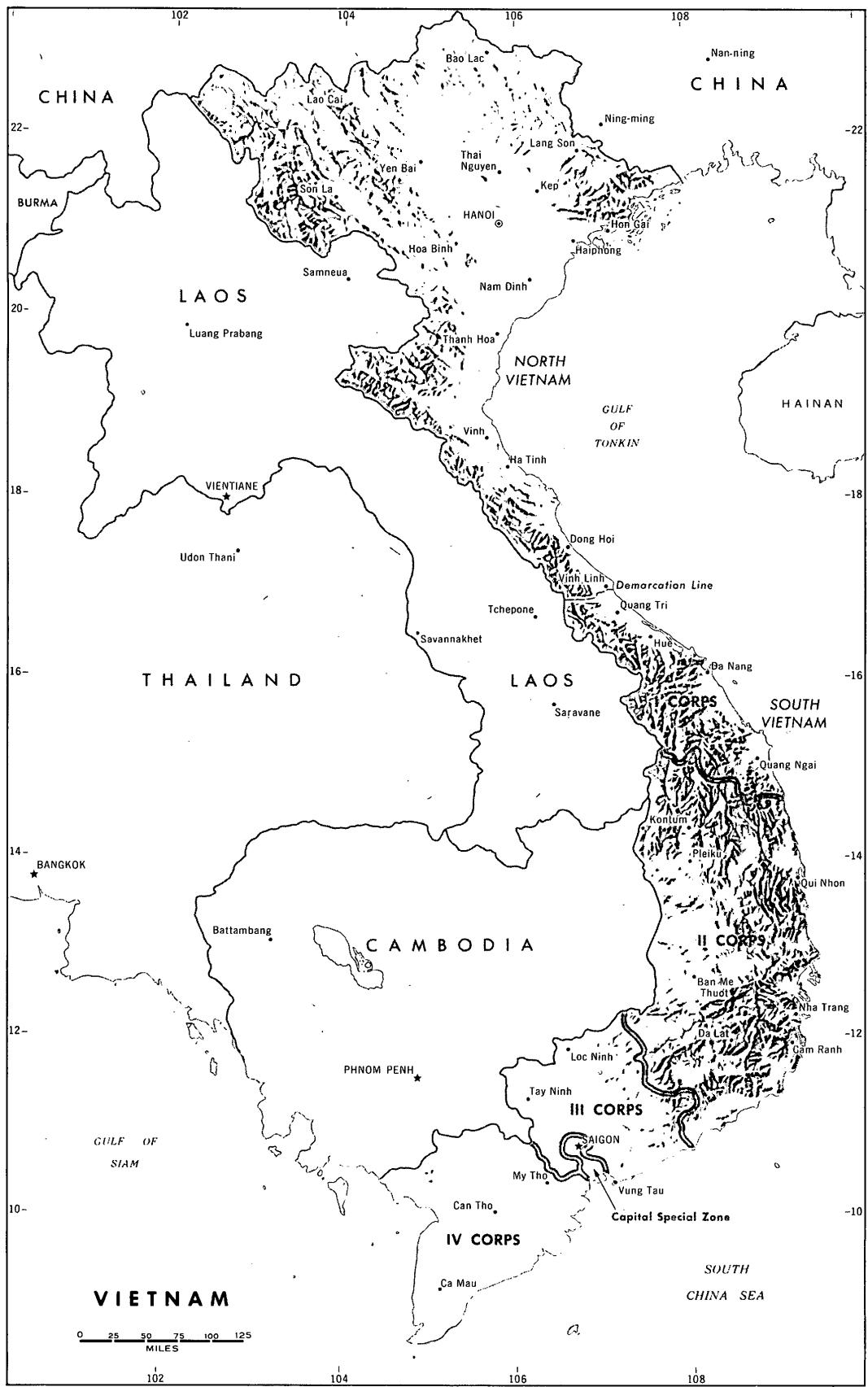
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the government is still sticking to its "national reconciliation" line, i.e., the Communists will be welcomed into the body politic only if they lay down their arms and renounce Communism.

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Ground action picked up somewhat yesterday as the Communists launched their first battalion-sized attack in several weeks, and allied forces caught several enemy units in unprepared positions. Enemy troops spotted setting up rockets some nine miles from the Bien Hoa Air Base 15 miles northwest of Saigon were hit by air and artillery.

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## II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

### THAILAND

The government, as forecast, was embarrassed by this week's lower house elections. Its party won only about 35 percent of the seats country-wide and none in Bangkok. The military leadership, however, should have little trouble lining up enough independents to form a working majority in the lower house, whose powers are in any case severely limited by the constitution.

The election results may nonetheless influence both the future policies and the make-up of the military leadership. Opposition elements, although they will have to tread lightly, for the first time in over ten years have a legitimate forum to express political dissent. Without a clear mandate from the electorate, the leadership will be more solicitous of such views. Within the establishment, factual disputes will be worsened as attempts are made to lay the blame for the government party's poor showing.

### BELGIUM

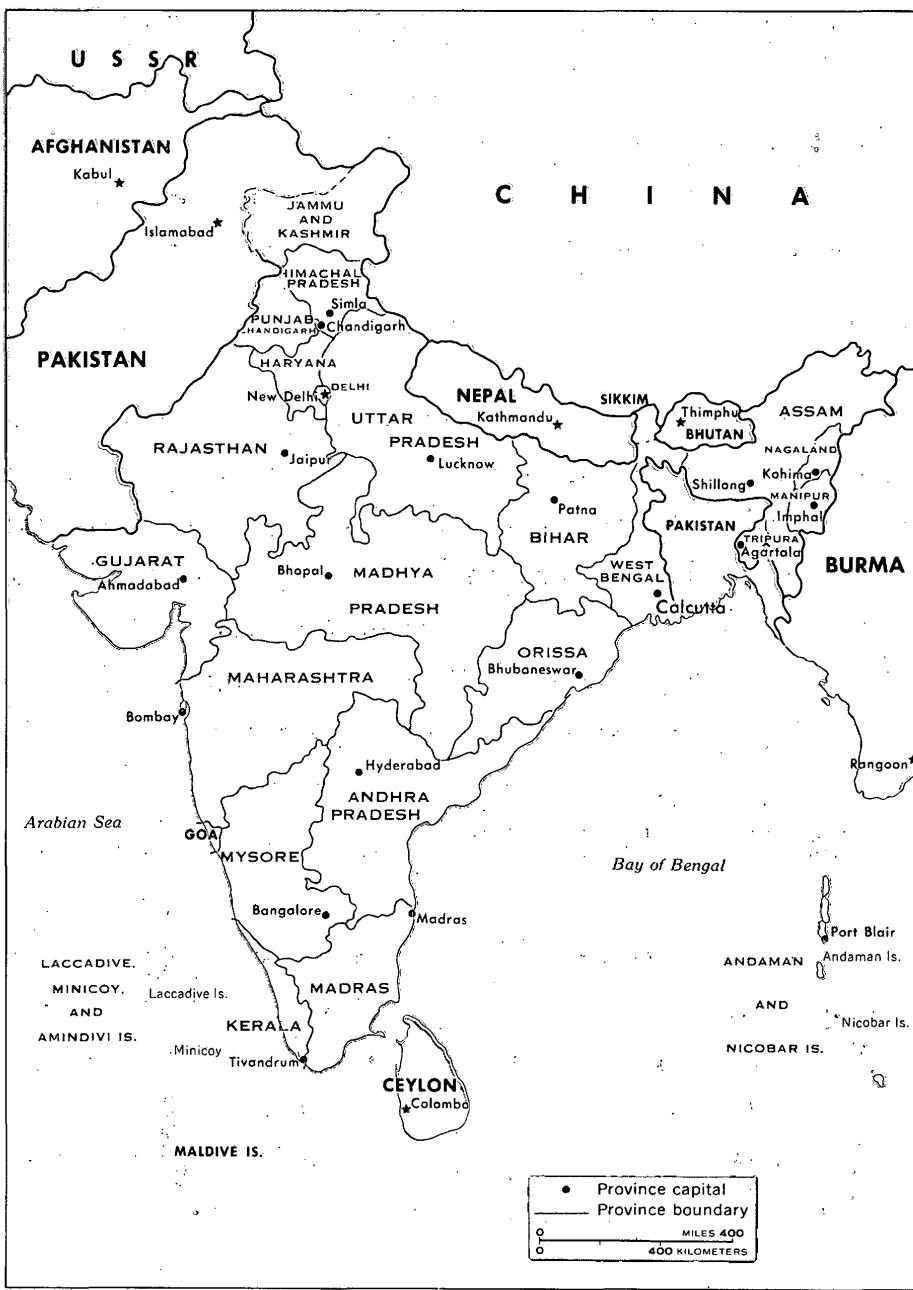
The Annex reviews major domestic pressures affecting the government of Belgium.

### INDIA

Returns from elections in four key states in north India are trickling in, and the Congress Party is in trouble. Perhaps the most ominous development is the landslide victory

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## INDIA



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being won in West Bengal by a united front led by India's two Communist parties.

A leftist front similar to this ousted the Congress government in elections two years ago. It then proceeded to show broad tolerance toward labor unrest in Calcutta and a peasant revolt in the northern part of the state. The front eventually fell apart, turmoil increased, and Mrs. Gandhi's government was forced to impose direct rule from New Delhi last February. Some such chain of events is a distinct possibility this time as well, but Congress, whose hold on the country has slipped badly in the last two years, is less well equipped now to cope with trouble.

In addition to diminishing further the chances for stable government in the four affected states, the elections do not speak well for Congress's ability to win the next national election, which must be held sometime in the next three years. Northern India has traditionally given the party its strongest support. Even in the current parliament, Congress has only a slight majority.

**USSR-GHANA**

Soviet President Podgorny has asked Ghana for the immediate release of two Soviet trawlers and their crews. The trawlers were seized last October ostensibly for violating Ghana's territorial waters

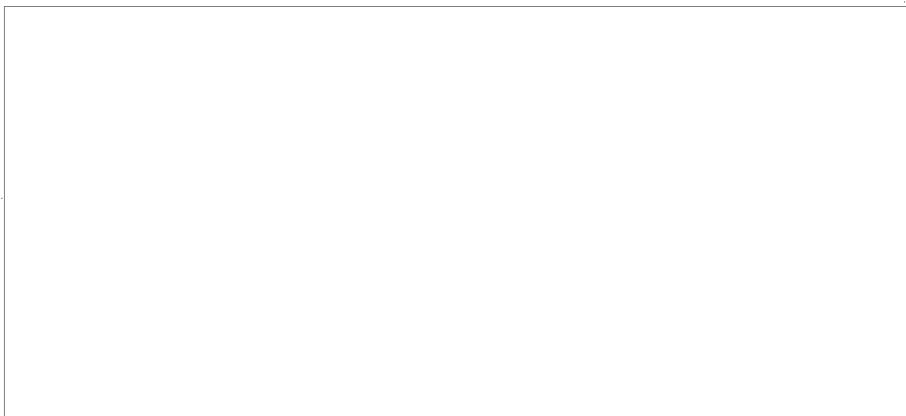
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Podgorny's request, following a similar one by Acting Foreign Minister

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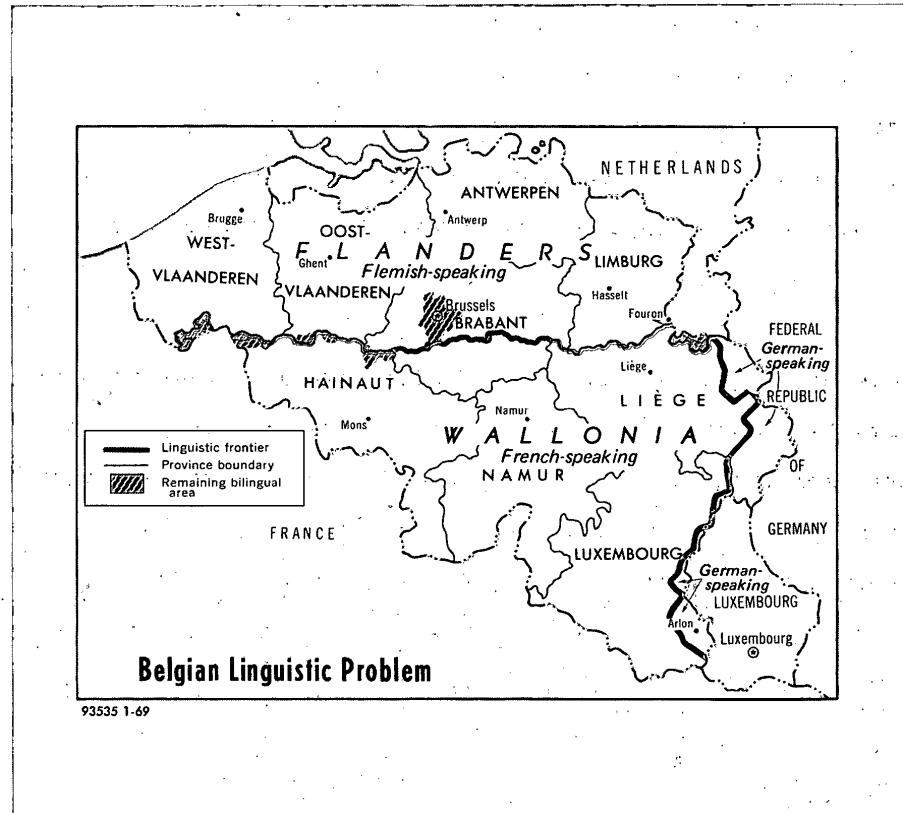
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Kuznetsov only three weeks ago, is evidence of Moscow's increasing impatience and may lead to further steps aimed at freeing the ships. One such, cancellation of a crude oil shipment to Accra, apparently has had no effect.



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BELGIUM\*

SIGNIFICANCE: Belgium's friendship for the United States, its advocacy of European integration, and its support of the Western Alliance have not wavered in the face of recurring crises and sixteen post-war changes in government. Through most of this century domestic political instability has been a direct outgrowth of the country's major ethnic division between the French-speaking Walloons, who traditionally dominated political and cultural life, and the now more numerous Dutch-speaking Flemings, whose language and culture were regarded as second rate. The survivability of the current coalition of Belgium's two largest parties, the moderate Social Christians and the Socialists, is now in considerable doubt, as Prime Minister Gaston Eyskens finds himself unable to muster the needed majorities in parliament for his basic program to ease ethnic tensions.

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The existence of three major political parties and a plethora of smaller ones, all based on regional as well as ideological differences of approach, make coalition governments the rule in Belgium. The sixty-three-year-old Eyskens is no stranger to the role of Prime Minister, having headed up three earlier governments. His present coalition came to power last June on a program of basic reforms, some of

*\*This is the first in a series of annexes dealing with domestic problems in the countries President Nixon is to visit.*

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which require constitutional amendment, designed to lessen the country's ethnic antagonisms. The elections of March 1968 showed overwhelming support for increased autonomy of the two linguistic communities, but none of the political parties was able to get a majority for its program. In fact, the parties are not themselves agreed internally on their own programs, because each contains a Walloon and a Flemish wing.

The showdown on the government's program may come as soon as Easter. The coalition commands the majority vote in parliament needed to pass the economic decentralization measures by which the Walloons hope to revive their region's lagging economy, but the Flemish deputies in both coalition parties have said they will vote for these measures only as a part of a package which includes their cultural demands. These include regional control of education, communication and the arts, and, being incorporated in a constitutional amendment, must have the support of two-thirds of the deputies. The coalition does not control two-thirds of the vote, and may not even be able to bring either program to a vote due to the decision of the opposition Liberals to boycott the session and thus prevent a quorum.

Ethnic disputes are not limited to affairs of government. The projected construction of a new electric steel furnace in Flanders, for example, aroused strong opposition in Wallonia, historically Belgium's iron and coal-producing region. The Flemings, for their part, have protested the establishment of a nuclear institute in Wallonia. When Brussels was proposed as the site for the first

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European World Trade Center, the Flemings drew up impressive plans for a competing center in Antwerp. (This dispute has recently been settled through compromise.) A decision to promote equality between Flemish and Walloon officers in the Army through early retirement of several French-speaking officers led a prominent Francophone general to resign in protest.

As bitter and protracted as the ethnic animosities are, there is little likelihood that the country will break up. There is almost no sentiment in Wallonia favoring incorporation into France, and the largely Roman Catholic Flemings have a hoary dislike for the Protestant House of Orange in the Netherlands. The Belgian economy, furthermore, is basically healthy and the business-oriented Belgians have been careful not to let ethnic considerations interfere with their pursuit of profits.

A hopeful sign is the recent intervention of King Baudouin on the side of cooperation between the two communities. At the end of World War II, there was strong antimonarchical sentiment in Belgium, largely because of the unheroic decisions of Baudouin's father at the time of the German invasion in 1940 and his choice of a consort following the queen's death. Although the monarchy was preserved at the price of his father's abdication in 1951, Baudouin until recently has striven to remain as passive a leader as possible.

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We believe the outlook is for a continuation of the almost glacial separation of the two communities. This will mean continued governmental instability and an unwillingness (even an inability at times) to deal decisively with pressing domestic issues. The result is likely to be a projection of the current tendency to compromise on makeshift and ad hoc solutions, leaving definitive resolution to the future. There may also be an increasing duplication of institutions in both communities accompanied by a burgeoning bureaucracy and waste of resources.

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